

1 House Resolution

2 A resolution acknowledging the abuses experienced by
3 children confined to the Arthur G. Dozier School for
4 Boys and the Okeechobee School, expressing the
5 Legislature's regret for such abuses, apologizing to
6 the boys who were confined to the Dozier School and
7 the Okeechobee School and their family members, and
8 expressing a commitment to ensuring that children
9 placed in the state's care are protected from abuse
10 and violations of human decency.

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12 WHEREAS, the Florida State Reform School, also called the
13 Florida Industrial School for Boys and later known as Arthur G.
14 Dozier School for Boys, referred to in this resolution as
15 "Dozier School", was opened by the State of Florida in 1900 in
16 Marianna to house children who had committed minor criminal
17 offenses such as incorrigibility, truancy, and smoking, as well
18 as more serious offenses such as theft and murder, and

19 WHEREAS, many of the children who were sent to Dozier
20 School were sentenced without legal representation before the
21 court, often without a known basis for being sent to the school
22 or specific duration of confinement, and

23 WHEREAS, within the first 13 years of Dozier School's
24 operation, 6 state-led investigations were conducted in response
25 to reports of children being chained to walls in irons, severely

26 | beaten, and used for child labor, and

27 | WHEREAS, throughout Dozier School's history, reports of
28 | abuse, suspicious deaths, and threats of closure plagued the
29 | school, and

30 | WHEREAS, many former students of Dozier School have sworn
31 | under oath that they were beaten at a facility located on Dozier
32 | School grounds known as the "White House", and

33 | WHEREAS, a psychologist employed at Dozier School testified
34 | under oath at a 1958 U.S. Senate Judiciary Hearing that boys at
35 | the school were beaten by an administrator, that the blows were
36 | severe and dealt with a great deal of force with a full arm
37 | swing over the head and down, that a leather strap approximately
38 | 10 inches long was used, and that the beatings were "brutality,"
39 | and

40 | WHEREAS, a former Dozier School employee stated in
41 | interviews with law enforcement that, in 1962, several employees
42 | of the school were removed from the facility based upon
43 | allegations that they made sexual advances towards boys at the
44 | facility, and

45 | WHEREAS, a forensic investigation funded by the Florida
46 | Legislature and conducted from 2013 to 2016 by the University of
47 | South Florida found incomplete records regarding deaths and
48 | burials that occurred at Dozier School between 1900 and 1960,
49 | and that families were often notified after the child was buried
50 | or denied access to their remains at the time of burial, and

51 WHEREAS, the excavations conducted as part of the forensic
52 investigation yielded 55 burial sites, 24 more sites than
53 reported in official records, and

54 WHEREAS, given the lack of documentation and contradictions
55 in the historical record, questions persist regarding the
56 identity of persons buried at Dozier School and the
57 circumstances surrounding their deaths, and

58 WHEREAS, in 1955, the State of Florida opened a new reform
59 school in Okeechobee, called the Flroida School for Boys at
60 Okeechobee School, referred to in this resolution as "Okeechobee
61 School," to address overcrowding at Dozier School, and staff of
62 Dozier School were transferred to the Okeechobee School where
63 similar practices were implemented, and

64 WHEREAS, many former students of the Okeechobee School have
65 sworn under oath that they were beaten at a facility on school
66 grounds known as the "Adjustment Unit", and

67 WHEREAS, former Governor Claude Kirk toured Dozier School
68 in 1968 and stated, "If one of your kids were kept in such
69 circumstances, you'd be up there with rifles," and

70 WHEREAS, Dozier School was closed in 2011 after
71 investigations by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and
72 the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of
73 Justice, and

74 WHEREAS, more than 500 former students of Dozier School and
75 the Okeechobee School have come forward with reports of

76 | physical, mental, and sexual abuse by school staff during the
77 | 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, and resulting trauma that has endured
78 | throughout their adult lives; NOW THEREFORE,

79 | Be It Resolved by the House of Representatives of the State of
80 | Florida:

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82 | That the House of Representatives regrets that the
83 | treatment of boys who were sent to the Dozier School and the
84 | Okeechobee School was cruel, unjust, and a violation of human
85 | decency, and acknowledges this shameful part of the State's
86 | history.

87 | BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the House of Representatives
88 | apologizes to the boys who were confined to the Dozier School
89 | and the Okeechobee School and their family members, for the
90 | wrongs committed against them by employees of the State of
91 | Florida.

92 | BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the House of Representatives
93 | expresses its commitment to ensuring that children who have been
94 | placed in the State's care are protected from abuse and
95 | violations of fundamental human decency.